

MIDDLE BRONZE AGE SPEARHEAD

Found on Tal y Bont Beach

Graham Roy Jones

Like many other detectorists I have been amazed by the rapid changes in new metal detecting technology. After hearing the praises of the Minelab Sovereign XS 2 Pro metal detector, I decided to try it for myself.

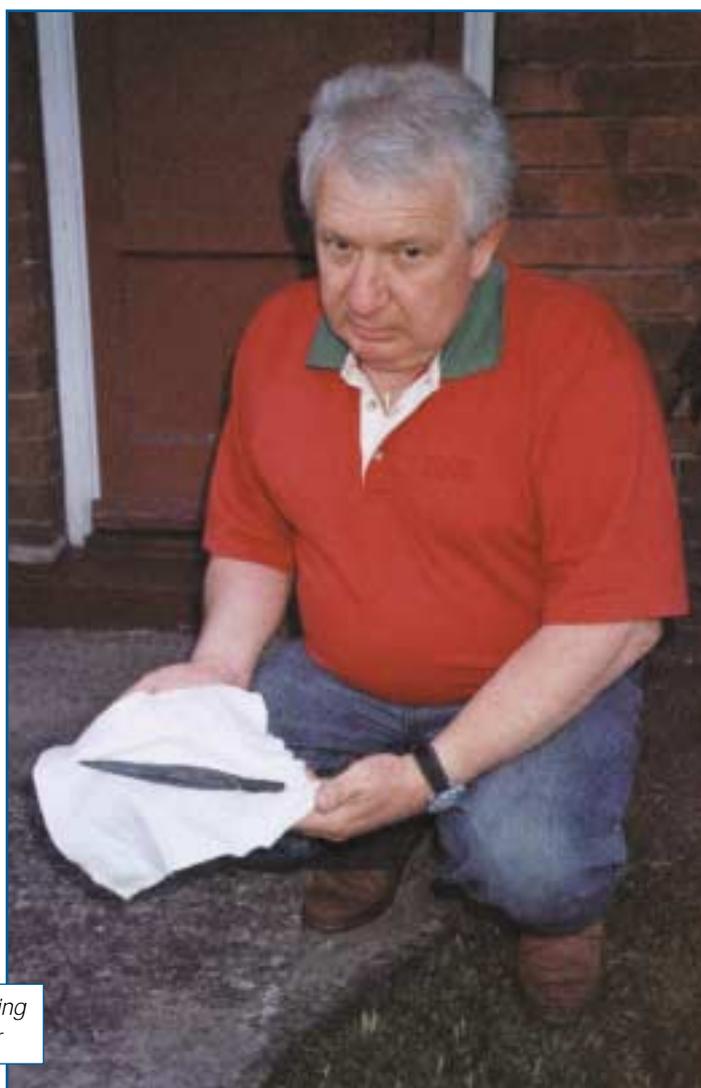
I bought the detector early last year and used it for the first time on the Easter weekend in April. This was on Tal y Bont Beach, near Barnmouth in Wales. It was about 1pm by the time we arrived there. The weather was bad and it was raining heavily. I was in the company of Bill Harris (author of the "Successful Beach Detecting" articles) and a friend called Dave.

The conditions on the beach seemed ideal with stones showing but no sand. There were also areas of dark clay evident. I had been detecting for some time, locating only bullets and scrap metal, when I was called over by Bill to see a gent's gold ring that he had just found. Dave was close by and had also been doing quite well with a silver signet ring and several coins.

At approximately 4.30pm, a loud positive signal sounded in my headphones and I decided that it was worth digging as I was getting the signal from an interesting patch of black stone and dark grey mud. (This is usually the type of area that produces old and interesting finds). I dug to a depth of about 5in and removed a clump of clay from which was coming a good positive signal. Sweeping the mass over the search head for a second check, I then decided to remove the clay encrusted around the object.

The object immediately attracted a lot of attention from Bill and Dave, who speculated as to its age. At first, purely from the good condition of the object, I thought it must be modern. Then came the realization that my find could be older than originally thought. There was a suggestion that it was a Roman spear, purely because the grey clay had given the surface of the object a green-grey patina.

I did not remove any more of the



*Roy holding
the spear*

clay from the spear realizing that it was protecting it. It was suggested that I take the item to Chester Museum for identification. Unfortunately, the museum was closed for refurbishment, so I then decided to try the local museum in Wrexham to see if they could help. On taking the spear into the museum, I received a receipt so that it could stay with the museum to be checked and identified. I then made arrangements to return

in two weeks' time to collect it.

Whilst the spear was in the museum in Wrexham I contacted Bangor University and discussed having photographs of the spear taken and forwarded to them. This was so that the spear could be recorded and listed in their archaeological records, since the item was found in the Gwynedd Area.

The spearhead is certainly my best find to date and I consider that it would take pride of place in my collection.

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The following report was eventually received from Frances Lynch of the University of Wales, Bangor:-

“Middle Bronze Age Spearhead from Tal y Bont, Merioneth

“The basal-looped spearhead illustrated here was found by Mr Roy Jones of Wrexham on the beach at Tal y Bont between Barmouth and Harlech on April 21st 2000. The weapon is not worn or smoothed by the sea and there are stains on the blade which suggest that it had laid until recently in some peaty soil. It is probable, therefore, that it had been recently eroded from coastal peats.

“The spear is 220mm long and 32mm wide across the widest part of the leaf-shaped blade. The socket, encircled by three lightly engraved lines, is 50mm long and 16-17mm in diameter at the mouth where it is approximately circular in cross section; further up, the section is sharply angular. Because part of the wooden shaft remains firmly wedged in place it is not possible to know how far the hollow socket extends. There are two neatly formed loops at the base of the blade, one a little larger and lower than the other. The two halves of the mould have been very slightly misaligned and the thickness of the socket metal varies around its circuit. There is a small blow hole in one side of the spine just above the loops.

“The metal is in good condition with a fairly uniform matt surface of blue/purple colour; nowhere is the patination shiny, which may be an effect of salt water and sand. The edges of the blade have been sharpened in the middle section in antiquity, creating a slightly ragged, thinner edge; the bottom of the socket has also seen a little damage which may have occurred during use.

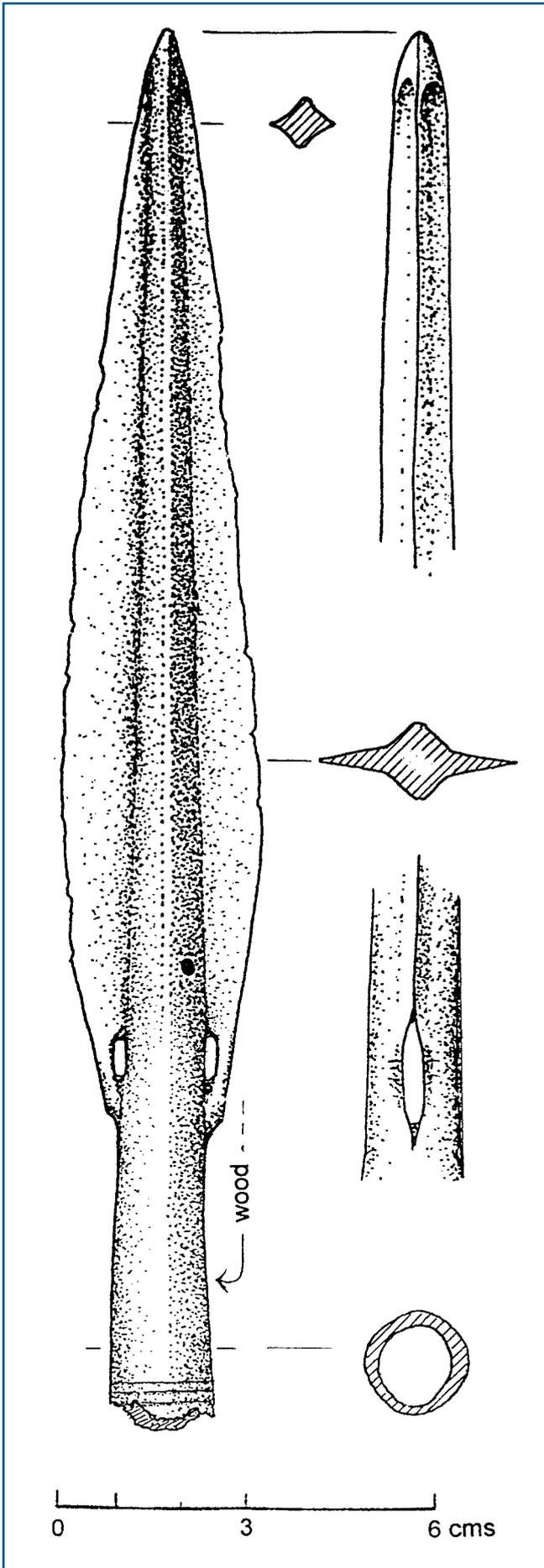
“This type of basal-looped spearhead with a smooth junction between loop and leaf-shaped blade belongs to the Taunton Phase of the Middle Bronze Age dating from between 1400 and 1300 cal BC (Needham 1997). It can be paralleled in the Taunton hoard itself and in the Stibbard hoard from Norfolk. In Wales the closest parallel is the very splendid weapon from Nebo near Llanrwst which is twice the length but has the same angular socket and essentially leaf-shaped blade (Bezant and Lowe 1912, 47; Ellis Davies 1929, 342). A spearhead from the river at Hay on Wye is of similar date but has a rather more complex section across the blade (Savory 1980, 112, fig. 27).

“The coastal area of Merioneth on



either side of the Mawddach has produced quite a number of chance finds of bronze implements over the years (Bowen and Gresham 1967, 109-28). The palstave is the main working tool of the period and there are several of both Middle and Late Bronze Age date; but in addition there are a surprising number of weapons. A spear, now lost, from Barmouth had loops on the socket, so probably belonged to an earlier phase than the Tal y Bont one; those from Llanfrothen and Brithdir are without loops and belong to the Late Bronze Age. The famous Cwm Moch hoard contains spears with basal loops but a rather more triangular blade which indicates a date in the Penard phase, about 1200 cal BC. This hoard also contains rapiers, the quintessential

Middle Bronze Age weapon, soon to be replaced by the leaf-shaped sword which first appears in this phase. Rapiers are everywhere rather rare, but Merioneth has produced another two, one from near Harlech and another from the Cwm Moch area. Two fine gold torcs (twisted 'neck rings' but long enough to be used as a belt) have been found, one near Harlech and the other on the slopes of Cadair Idris. At a slightly later date a splendid bronze shield was buried in a bog near Gwern Einion and a rare bronze bucket was similarly offered to the gods at Arthog (Bowen and Gresham 1967, 126-7). Coastal Merioneth may therefore be regarded as a region of wealth and splendour in the Bronze Age. The quantity of material is not especially large, but the quality and interest of the pieces is high.”



Postscript

After leaving the spear with the museum, I have since heard from Bangor University expressing an interest in obtaining it. They wish to examine it for themselves. This was due to the photographs that were forwarded on to them, as they had requested.

The Head of the Archaeological Department wished me to arrange to be available at the local main library in Wrexham for one of their associates to come and collect the spear. Unfortunately, due to my work pattern, I was not available to assist in the request. However, my wife Barbara was available.

Immediately I received the spear back from Wrexham Museum, I confirmed the arrangements with the Bangor University Archaeological Department. Some time later I received a written communication from the Head of the Archaeological Department expressing their interest in the spear. Detailed information as to its age, type, condition, location, etc, was also sent to me.

It seems from the information gathered - not only by myself but also through historical documentation - that the spear could prove to be unique. TH